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War

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The Fellowship for a Christian Social Order

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[*Editorial Note:* Dr. William Austin Smith is the editor of the *Churchman*. This address was given at the recent conference of "The Fellowship for a Christian Social Order" at Lake Mohonk. It was distributed to the leading religious and secular papers of the United States through the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America. It voices a growing determination of Christian men and women everywhere to war against war.]

Obviously there can not be real fellowship among nations while people of different tongues prepare to murder one another and war continues to be on the agenda of governments and churches. I therefore address myself to the topic of war and the Churches.

I have not sufficient grace to be a pacifist, nevertheless I do not believe we shall ever end the stupid, beastly business of war until the Christian Church declares war to be a sin, and follows up that declaration with appropriate action. When the *Churchman* last November made that declaration, we were accused of not thinking the thing through. The *New Republic* commended our kind heart, but spoke patronizingly of our mind. The *Continent* condemned our morals. The Church Militant, it declared in substance, must fight Jehovah's enemies. It ought to be a disquieting consideration to the defenders of a militant Church that ministers are always disposed to identify the enemies of Jehovah with the enemies of their own particular country, an attitude which would make

opposing governments infallible interpreters of God's will.

We need not repudiate the last war. The Church need not have declared war to be a sin in the year 1914 any more than it should have declared slavery to be a sin in the year one. It would be as idle a moral pastime to repudiate the past wars as it would be to repudiate our polygamous forefathers. Moral systems, we all know, are not handed down from Heaven in complete parcels. They grow. I am not contending that war was a sin five, ten or a hundred years ago. I am contending that *henceforth* war is a sin. It has now been fully revealed to us what war is made of, what are its unclean causes, its substance and its results. I maintain that if God has made anything clear to the mind of Christendom, He has revealed to us the sinfulness of war. If the Christian Church blesses another war, its blessing and its curse will have no further authority and prestige for our civilization. There are tremendous risks and some baffling perplexities in such an attitude, but the perplexities are not greater, nor the risks more perilous, than those incurred if the Church should undertake to champion another world-wide civil war. For my purpose I accept Thomas Aquinas' definition of sin: "An act not in accord with reason informed by the divine law."

If the Church is to take such a stand, it must begin at once a great crusade of preparedness; for to declare conduct sinful without urging preventive measures would be slothful. he anti-social forces in society which accept war as inevitable, and desirable, are not slothful. They make ready the ground to produce the event. They spend brain as well as money in preparedness. They wilfully produce provocatives. They maintain the type of civilization which requires war as an implement and an asset. Suppose the

Church were to declare war to be a sin. What should be its educational program? Such an inquiry comes, I think, within the range of our topic.

I

First, I think that the Church should at once begin to codify the spiritual experience of the world war of 1914. What is now required of us who believe war to be an unmitigated curse, is to give the Church a memory. Bishop Gore was visiting in this country when the Armistice was declared. Amid the lighthearted rejoicing of the hour, Dr. Gore's attitude was disappointing to many of our bellicose clergy, who, generally speaking, are disposed to think well of Anglican bishops. American churchmen, especially our outstanding spokesmen, were still in a state of spiritual ecstasy over the war. One of them wanted to march into the Brandenburg Gate. Most of our New York rectors were still dreaming dreams and seeing visions of what the war would do for the soul of the race. Bishop Gore was disappointing to these militant priests. He quoted history. They had forgotten history. He was both a Christian and a scholar. He remembered that war had always been a spiritual depressant.

During the three years which have followed the Armistice, the ecstasy of the clergy over the religious texture of war has abated. It began to abate in England and Europe after the first three months. But will the Church remember what it has learned? We have tabulated the wages of many kinds of sin—lust, intemperance, greed. What the last war taught us about the sinful fruits of war, let us hold fast in the memory! Let us teach it, shout it from the housetops, put it into pamphlets and books, into sermons and catechisms, into commandments and programs, and

into a mighty, world-wide crusade, with a train of martyrs sealing the truth, if need be, with their blood! Then, if the world should determine to go to war again in our generation, the Church will have the documents to give the lie to those propagandists, laymen, women and priests, who will again talk of war as Calvary and its sacrifices as spiritual discipline.

May I be pardoned for quoting from an article which I wrote for the *Atlantic Monthly* in the autumn of 1914, entitled "Some False Consolations of War?"

> "I refuse to find one scrap of comfort in Europe's return to God as the nations sob their litanies in the crowded churches. This mighty wave of patriotism has cleansed the fountains of life, it is true. It has purified like fire. Despite the strife of tongues, the house has been cleansed of many an unlovely and sordid desire, but does any one suppose that this will last? That Russia is permanently temperate? That Germany and France will be henceforth devout? England unworldly? Have these high moments in the heat of war distilled for us essences so rare and beautiful?"

The event has proved these words to be true. But shall we remember our war experiences the next time our armies begin to march? Shall the Church continue to teach historical untruths, and utter the same tragic words of hate which we uttered in 1914? If the war makers should hold the faintest suspicion that the pulpits of Christendom would do their own Christian thinking about war, and exercise the liberty of choice whether they should bless or condemn it, our governments would be more deliberate about setting the stage for another war.

First, then, as a preventive of war, we should insist that the Church shall cultivate a memory, and out of that memory teach, early and late, in season and out of season, the wages of the sin of war. In all the

anti-war propaganda, material waste and physical suffering have received the major emphasis. These considerations will never end war. The conviction that war is sin alone will bring the issue squarely before the conscience of the race, and give wings to its latent idealism. Thus far, neither the brain nor the conscience of the Church has been enlisted in its crusade against war. We have acquiesced in the political doctrine of war as the lesser of two evils; we have staked nothing on a great crusade of preparedness for peace.

II

If the Churches declare war to be a sin, we must seek to discover what are the irritants in our present social order which tend to produce war. What is fundamentally wrong with the civilization which, every few decades, brings the plain peoples of the world into the shambles, stains their souls with unreasoning hate, and makes beasts out of heroic, chivalrous men? Something is radically wrong. What is it? The Christian Church need not bless this civilization any more than it need bless the Soviet Republic. The Church produced the civilization of the Middle Ages, such as it was. The Church had very little to do either with making or bettering our present civilization in its basic qualities. The Church accepted it as the industrial revolution molded it, and we became its handmaid. Protestantism in England a hundred years ago became the tool of the great industrial forces. Protestantism acquiesced in its cruelties, its frightful economic inequalities, its soul-blighting conditions of labor. Can we read without a blush of shame the names of the bishops and archbishops who sat in the House of Lords and voted "No" on the bills introduced to alleviate the horrible lot of

the little chimney climbers and of the children who worked in the mines and scarcely ever saw daylight? Yes, and the names of pious Evangelicals and Methodists of a hundred years ago, who, while they wept over the lot of West Indian slaves, refused to lift up their voices in behalf of the slaves of England's factories! The amelioration of the conditions of the working classes, the abolition of some of the frightful conditions of child labor, were carried through with little assistance from the clergy. That battle, it must be said to our shame, was won by illiterate labor leaders. Denied the sympathy of the Church, the learning of the schools, and the equal justice of the courts, they finally won; but they won without the support of the men who claimed to receive through a golden stream of apostolic grace the love and light of Christ.

Not one churchman in ten thousand, I venture to say, has the slightest idea of the social implications of his creed; not one in ten thousand perceives the dramatic social significance of our two great festivals, Christmas and Easter Day. Of the thousands of worshipers in our churches on Good Friday, who watch at the Cross for three hours in great pity for the sufferings of Christ, how many ever give a thought to that long line of Christ's little brothers, bearing witness to fellowship, who through the centuries have hung upon crosses, crucified by the defenders of the *status quo?* When the Church shall be willing to take some of the magic out of the doctrine of the Incarnation, and put morality in it, we shall make religion a more effective implement of fellowship.

Therefore I maintain that some of us within the Churches who are not satisfied with a civilization which brings its beneficiaries, every generation or two, into the shambles, must continue, as some of this group are doing, to weigh in the scales of Christian

ethics our present social order. We must make fellowship prevail at home in our industrial order, before we can hope to make fellowship prevail among the nations.

III

If governments would declare war against the real enemies of the men whom they conscript, the Church could enter such a war with all the zeal of a covenanter, convinced that the battle is the Lord's. The difficulty is that the real enemies do not get ranged opposite each other in the trenches. We are taught to hate the innocent. The Church aids and abets this bestial business in which every government engages in the time of war, of blasting people's souls with the indecencies of hate. They lie to us and we pass on the lies in our sermons. They deceive us and we build commandments on their deceits. Nobody ever deserves to be hated as nations hate one another in war. To produce such venom, the hate makers lie about their fellow men. They lie outrageously. They lie out of whole cloth. They suppress the truth which would mitigate hate. They deliberately spread a spiritual plague. They breathe out the hate germs from their press bureaus. Chiefs of propaganda bureaus release the germs every morning. They befoul the minds of simple, honest, good-natured people with their lies. Finally they succeed in producing a *fighting edge*. Most farmers, artisans, clerks, fathers of families, and mothers, prefer peace to war. They would rather raise crops, make and sell merchandise, than to lie in the trenches waiting to kill somebody or to be killed. Without the help of the devil we couldn't make warriors of men to-day. The Church blesses this beastly business! And journalists call it the lesser of two evils! The next war may be the lesser of two

evils; but if the Church blesses that war it will be committing a sin, for God has given us the intelligence and the conscience to prevent it.

If war really meant killing the enemy, the Church might view it as they do capital punishment—grim, but necessary. But the enemy doesn't get into the trenches. We are told that Stinnes of Germany was the instigator and the brain of the rape of Belgium. It was he who for commercial reasons counseled the stripping of Belgium's industries and the crippling of the French mines. It was he who counseled the deportation of expert Belgian workmen to German factories. But how can Belgian and French patriots ever avenge themselves upon Stinnes by going to war against Germany? He is probably richer to-day than he ever was. It isn't Stinnes that they bomb, and gas, and bayonet when they go to war. It is innocent victims like themselves, their own blood-brothers in Christ.

War is growing to be ever a more diabolical and indecent and unreasonable thing. When we say war is sin, we mean modern war in its depraved totality, its lying and its lust, its atrocity provoked by lies, its counter-atrocities, provoked by atrocities, its food blockades—the worst atrocity of all—its vengeance wreaked upon unborn babes. I have heard Christian women say that every German baby ought to be killed. That is the state of mind which governments, when they declare war, foist upon the Church. Is it, or is it not, a sin? How long will the descendants of the apostles permit politicians and diplomats to tell them when and how they should abrogate the Gospel, teach a new commandment of hate, and bless rapine and murder? Isn't it about time we used the intelligence God gave us to discern what war is? The people who are shocked when we say that war is sin, are thinking of

war in abstract terms. They define it to be justice battling against wrong, chivalry against the bully. It is no longer that. The bullies don't get into the trenches. The real sinners never breathe the poison gas.

IV

We can make war on war psychology by shifting the emphasis of adulation from war heroes to men and women who have wrought some good work on behalf of Christian fellowship. Obviously the great teachers, doctors, scientists, deserve honorable mention. What folly that school children should know all about Napoleon, and so little about Pasteur! All about Sherman and nothing about the men who gave their lives to conquer the yellow fever germ in Cuba! Our calendar of saints is too exclusive. I should like to see the lives written, for use in Sunday schools, of the great labor leaders, whose names few of us even know, who in those terrible years of industrial revolution in England, from 1760 to 1832, led their people out of that terrible slavery of factories and mines, hounded by governments, persecuted by the courts. Men like Cobbett, Hardig, Thelwell, Watson, Gerreld, Place, Knight, Prentice, and hundreds of others whose names are only preserved in the criminal records of their country. They did quite as much, perhaps, for the poor of England as the Wilberforces, Hannah More, Whitfield and Wesley, for while the Evangelicals had their eyes fixed on Heaven and the sound churchmen of the Establishment had one eye fixed on the good things of this world, untutored labor leaders bore in prison and on the scaffold the cross of labor's emancipation.

V

We can also make war on experts. It is humiliating to read in the daily papers what young Theodore

Roosevelt, the Assistant Secretary of the Navy, thinks is necessary to insure our national safety, while bishops and other ministers who ought to know something about the spiritual forces which make for security, lend a reverent and attentive ear. Army and navy experts and statesmen have been giving the plain peoples of the world protection for a good many centuries. But wars and famine and unemployment go merrily on. Why shouldn't the Church exhibit some of its expert knowledge? I don't think we could kill many more people by our mistakes than our highly honored experts have been doing heretofore. Groups such as the one meeting here under this roof ought to speak with authority, and to speak loud. We should have our program for international defense and national good-will. There is a very large multitude of people who want something like a Kingdom of Heaven established on earth and are willing to use their brains to promote it.

VI

"This is all very well, but what do you propose to do? You say you are not a pacifist, yet you urge the Church to boycott war and declare it to be a sin. What if Japan should attack California to-morrow? What if some bully of a junker should slap your grandmother on the face? What if England should attempt to crush France? Or Russia and Germany should pool issues and overrun Europe? What if the Crescent should again come to grips with the Cross? War can be the lesser of two evils. Would you bolt patriotism and morality and go it alone on a fine formula?"

I am not greatly concerned about these "what ifs." I can suggest them as fast as my opponents.

What if the Church should discover where its true mission lies—among the great mass of the world's plain people, of every nationality and clime—and its

voice should be lifted among the people to win their trust and give them Christian leadership. Wouldn't that voice be heard by governments and statesmen as the voice of the English Labor Party was heard by Lloyd George, when a war with Russia was under advisement?

What if, when the men who have business interests in Mexico begin to fill the press with their pre-war atrocity stories, and their representatives in Congress begin to talk intervention—what if the Church spoke up and said, "You can't make war upon Mexico. We shall preach peace while you are preaching war. We shall denounce conscription. We shall go to jail if need be, not as pacifists or conscientious objectors, but as Christian citizens, who refuse any longer to be made fools of in the name of false patriotism!"

What if the Church took so seriously to heart the gravity of the sin of war that we started to carry on the biggest crusade that the Church has ever attempted in the long years of her history, spent our missionary dollars upon it, spent our brain upon it! What would war-makers think of the expediency of making war with this kind of inflammable material at home?

What if the Churches here in America should flood Asia and Europe and the islands of the sea with propaganda against war, drop it from aeroplanes, instead of dropping bombs, send it through secret channels, teach it in mission stations? What if we meant business? What if we refused to spend our talent, our prayers, our parishioners' money, in teaching the Gospel of good-will, only to send up in a flame of war-hate all the costly product of our patient labors?

Has the Church ever done any thinking for preparedness for peace? No, we have gone on believing what statesmen have told us, that war is the lesser

of two evils and the battle is always the Lord's. We have docilely hated those we have been told to hate, and we have pretty nearly preached in time of war what we have been told to preach. We have lied with the liars, and we have committed spiritual atrocities to order, and all the while we believed that humanity and God loved to have it so. Isn't it time we did better? The last war may have been the lesser of two evils; the next war will be suicide. If we believe this, let us begin at once to educate statesmen, newspapers and the clergy. The next war must be boycotted by the Church of Christ.

A big risk indeed! But war is a big risk. It is a risk to slaughter the flower of the race, to fill the world with enervating hate and benumb its intelligence by hysteria, to lay waste empires and to spread famine over the planet. People talk as if pacifism were the only risk, and as if the religion which repudiated war threatened the foundations of government. Are some of those foundations too precious to be disturbed?

So against the "what ifs" of a Church in revolt, I present another "what if." What if the Church should decide to trust its Lord and God, and, with a little of the martyr's zeal, dedicate to humanity its conscience and its brain? We have the vision, but we let cynics stamp upon it, and we tremble and grow faint at their scoffings and their doubts. I am sure that God never founded a Church and sealed it with the Blood of His Son merely to do what this Church of Christ has done, with its brain and its conscience, during the last hundred years.

Can any one doubt that God wills we should cleanse this world of war? Then why not trust God to help us find the implement wherewith to rid the planet of the loathesome thing? We shall never

abolish war by gradual improvement and the slow processes of redemption of human nature. Dueling was not abolished by converting duelists. Men still insult and impugn one another's honor, but they don't fight duels. Dueling was abolished by a fiat of the Christian conscience. If we wait to abolish war till all men love one another, we shall wait until Judgment Day. Some generation has got to stop the thing short. Why not ours?

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